

**California Historical Records
Statewide Planning Project**

**Assessment Report of Records Programs in
Local Governments and Historical Repositories**

**History Associates Incorporated
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California Historical Records Advisory Board Assessment Report of Records Programs in Local Governments and Historical Repositories

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the California Historical Records Statewide Planning Project, the California Historical Records Advisory Board (CHRA) contracted with History Associates Incorporated to conduct an assessment of records programs in local governments and historical repositories in the state of California. This report evaluates the current status of records management and archival programs in California's local governments and historical repositories. 215 cities and 35 of 58 counties participated in the survey, as did 244 historical repositories.

The assessment of records programs in California indicates that most local governments and historical records repositories have significant needs. A minority of local governments have records management programs and only a handful have archives programs. Public records, both temporary and permanent, are not a priority for executive-level and department-level administration in most of California's local governments. During the past twenty years, there has been no improvement in the overall situation of public records. Most inactive records continue to be stored in substandard facilities such as basements, attics, closets, cupboards, storage sheds, and unimproved warehouses. Most inactive records continue to be disorganized and difficult to access. Historic records are not protected by state legislation, nor are counties and cities mandated to preserve them. New records keeping technologies have increased the dangers faced by public records, rather than improved the situation. Electronic records are not listed on records retention and disposition schedules, even if cities and counties have schedules in place. Many local government agencies are engaging in digitization projects in which they digitize permanent records and then dispose of the originals without considering quality control issues or the relatively short lifespan of electronic media and of the equipment and software needed to access that electronic media. In short, California's public records are in jeopardy.

While California has a number of justifiably well-regarded historical records repositories that operate in accordance with archival standards in all or most areas, the assessment demonstrates that the majority of historical records repositories face significant challenges in their effort to preserve California's historical records. 56% of such repositories operate on a budget of less than \$10,000 per year. As a result, they do not have access to paid professional staff, adequate facilities, or archival quality storage supplies. Most are only open to researchers a limited number of hours per week or month. Only 10% of staff in California's historical records repositories have graduate degrees in archival administration. The staff at a majority of historical records repositories received

their archival training (if they have any) by attending one or two day workshops on various archival topics.

It is clear that the majority of local government and historical repository records programs operate under tremendous challenges and have few resources available to help them manage and preserve California's public and historical records. Public and private repositories have both expressed a desire to have the California State Archives and the CHRAB assume a more active role in advocating for the state's historical records. The types of assistance particularly desired by repositories are for the State Archives to serve as a clearinghouse for information about records management and preservation, as well as a source of professional archival advice and assistance. Repositories would also welcome greater involvement by CHRAB in the problems of California's records programs. CHRAB could contribute greatly both by raising the level of visibility of records in California and by establishing a regrant program to provide funding for archival projects of various kinds. Without such assistance, California's rich documentary heritage will continue to be at risk.

METHODOLOGY

Dr. Gabriele Carey represented History Associates. In consultation with California State Archives staff, she designed an assessment instrument to gather information about records programs in California's local governments and historical repositories. The local government assessment instrument consisted of 35 questions and covered topics including program administration, records scheduling and disposition, records storage, micrographics and digital imaging, and general records management issues. In June 2000, the assessment instrument was sent to city clerks in all of California's incorporated cities (approximately 450 total) and to county clerks, county clerk-recorders, and county administrative/executive officers in all fifty-eight of California's counties. Cities and counties were asked to complete and return their assessment instruments by the end of July 2000, although forms received later are included in the assessment findings. 35 (ca. 60%) of California's counties responded to the survey, as did 215 (ca. 48%) of California's cities. For several cities and counties, more than one department returned the survey. In these cases, each response was counted separately. As a result, there were more than 250 responses to many questions.

The historical repository assessment instrument consisted of 35 questions soliciting information about the responding institutions, historical records collections, collection access, collection users, facilities and equipment, preservation and conservation, staff and volunteers, financial support, and needs and priorities. The assessment instrument was sent to a sampling of about 400 of California's approximately 800 historical repositories in October 2000, with a requested return date of December 29, 2000. 244 repositories, or approximately 25% of California's historical repositories, responded to the survey. Not all respondents answered every question on the survey, however, so a number of questions have fewer than 244 responses.

The assessment findings also contain information gathered during 8 “town hall” meetings on records issues held from August 2000 to April 2001. In order to maximize participation from all California’s regions, the meetings were held in as many different areas of the state as budget constraints and scheduling issues allowed. Meeting sites consisted of Riverside, San Diego, and Thousand Oaks in Southern California and Sacramento, Fresno, San Jose, Santa Rosa, and Redding in Northern California. Representatives of the area’s cities and counties, as well as of selected area historical repositories, were invited to each of these regional town hall meetings. Approximately half of each meeting was devoted to a presentation by project staff providing meeting attendees with information about the CHRAB and the California Historical Records Statewide Planning Project, about the State Archives’ Local Records Program, and about records-related developments at the national level. The other half of each meeting provided a forum for meeting attendees to discuss their records issues and concerns and to communicate any records-related needs that the CHRAB could address with existing or new programs. At 6 of the 8 town hall meetings, separate half-day sessions were held for representatives of local governments and for representatives of historical repositories. Due to the small number of local governments and historical repositories in the remaining 2 regions, a combined half-day session was held for both local government and historical repository representatives.

RECORDS ISSUES IN CALIFORNIA’S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

It has been twenty years since the California State Archives last conducted an assessment of the local records programs in California’s cities and counties. In that time, the records-related concerns identified by cities and counties have not changed, so much as expanded. In addition to concerns, such as records education, appraisal, preservation and storage, that troubled local government records keepers twenty years ago, concerns now include those resulting from technological advancements such as the management of electronic records and digitization.

The priority California’s cities and counties place on the management of their records varies greatly. Of the 256 respondents (of approximately 510 surveys sent out), 193 stated that they have a records management program. The five components most commonly mentioned by respondents as being part of their records management program are records storage (192 responses), records destruction (180 responses), records inventorying (147 responses), files management (114 responses), and records scheduling (113 responses). 25% or more of the respondents also stated that archives, microfilming, vital records, or digitization were a component of their records program. The respondents identified problems in each aspect of their records management programs, except for records destruction.

Major areas of concern have remained constant since the last statewide survey twenty years ago. These include worries over a lack of administrative support, staff (trained and otherwise), adequate and appropriate storage space, archival equipment and

supplies, funds, and retention and disposition schedules. Another concern is the need for information regarding document imaging, electronic records, and historical records.

Administrative Support

Most of the concerns listed above are merely symptoms of a larger problem, namely the lack of administrative support for records management in many cities and counties. If records management were a priority for city and county administrators, they would provide the funding necessary (barring major economic recessions) to ensure that local government records receive the care they require. Additional funding would enable cities and counties to establish records programs for both temporary and permanent records by hiring trained and experienced records managers and archivists, providing quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and appropriate space for records storage and collateral functions, and providing storage supplies and equipment that meet archival standards.

Currently, both survey respondents and town hall meeting attendees agree that a lack of administrative support prevents them from providing city and county records with the sort of care that is needed. Only 90 responding cities and counties have professional records managers and archivists on staff. It is thus not surprising that 174 respondents cite a lack of trained personnel as a “records management problem.” Without a trained records manager, it is difficult for a city or county to efficiently and cost effectively manage its records. In the absence of a records manager, other city and county staff are assigned to manage records, usually on the department level. As a result, “records management” is generally limited to finding storage space, and retrieving and filing records. Retention is not consistent across all city and county departments and records are either retained much longer than necessary, thus wasting valuable space, or destroyed when they should be retained. The focus is on records that are needed in the short term, rather than on permanent records which places historical records at risk. Due to a lack of time, staff for whom records management is only one of many assignments are often not able to adequately keep track of records. This means that current and non-current records frequently cannot be found when needed, thus wasting valuable staff time. In short, the money saved by not hiring professional records managers is often wasted on an inefficient use of storage space and staff time.

The only “problem” cited by more respondents (179) than a lack of trained staff is a lack of space. According to survey respondents and to attendees at town hall meetings, both the quantity and the quality of space is inadequate. 167 respondents store inactive records in records centers or warehouse facilities, while 89 do not. 94 of these records centers and warehouse facilities are owned by the city/county and 55 are owned by a private vendor. 18 respondents use both city/county owned and private vendor storage facilities. Most other inactive records are stored in vaults (137 respondents), offices (88), and basements or attics (45), although a few respondents also store their inactive records in store rooms, storage sheds, trailers, and storage containers. Historical records are stored in the same types of facilities as inactive records, but they are more likely to be

stored by a private agency, such as a museum, library, or historical society, rather than by the city or county itself. 13 cities and counties deposit, loan, or donate their historical records to such an agency. In these cases, local governments lose control over how their permanent public records are managed and preserved.

It is not only the amount of space available that is a problem, it is also the kind of space available. Over time, records are harmed when stored under inadequate conditions. Given this reality, survey respondents were asked how they protect their records from potential sources of harm including fire, flood, leaking roof/pipes, theft/vandalism, light, heat, dirt, and vermin. A handful of respondents reported that their facilities meet archival standards. In most cities and counties this is not the case, although some measures are taken to protect records. Cities and counties are most likely to take those measures that protect employees, as well as records. The primary reason for undertaking these protective measures is thus employee safety and well being, not the provision of an appropriate environment for records preservation. Such measures include the outfitting of work (and storage) areas with fire alarms, smoke detectors, sprinkler systems, security systems, air conditioning, seismic reinforcing, braced and bolted shelving to reduce the possibility of collapse during earthquakes, as well as the provision of building maintenance, housekeeping, and pest control services.

Additional measures taken only because they protect records are likely to be those that can be implemented easily and inexpensively. These include storing records in already extant vaults or in fire proof cabinets, outfitting records storage areas with lights that automatically shut off (thus saving energy costs, as well as promoting the longevity of records) when they detect no movement in the room, storing records at least 4 inches above floor level to prevent water damage from leaks or floods, covering records in leak-prone areas with plastic tarps, and monitoring storage areas and records to immediately identify problems. While almost every respondent had implemented one or more of the above protective measures, only a select few had implemented enough of them to provide a safe environment for their records.

Storing records in archival quality storage equipment and in acid-free boxes and folders is one way to protect records even in the absence of an optimum storage environment. Enclosing boxes in sturdy, acid-free containers and enclosures provides them with a measure of protection from dust, variable temperatures and humidity, light, leaking pipes, and earthquakes. Unfortunately, town hall meeting attendees and 39% of survey respondents identified a lack of funding for purchasing such storage equipment and supplies as a problem.

Several town hall attendees suggested that the problem of providing adequate facilities for storing the records of local governments could be solved by the development of centralized records repositories. Based on conversations with all the city clerks in one of California's counties and a sampling of city and county clerks in a number of other counties, a centralized records repository would not be a popular solution to the problem of storing local government records. The major concern raised by most of the city and county clerks was the perceived loss of control over local records. These local

government officials strongly believe that they have a mandate to make their city's or county's records accessible to city/county staff and to the public. To achieve this goal, the records must be physically under their control. A central storage repository, no matter how ideal, does not allow city and county clerks to make records immediately available and is thus not seen as an option for two thirds (162 of 256) of the survey respondents and the town hall meeting attendees.

A lack of funding is the crux of all the above problems. With enough funding, cities and counties could hire professional records management and archives staff, provide the quantity and quality of space needed to house records, and purchase high-quality and special purpose storage equipment and supplies to house records. However, in the competition for local government funding, the needs of records tend to lag behind, because records usually are not seen as a priority by resource allocators at the city and county level. This is understandable in times of economic recession or stagnation, since public safety and human welfare must take precedence over the well being of public records, however, records management functions generally do not receive necessary funds even when the economy is good. The only reasonable explanation for this is that city and county administrators do not see public records as a priority. Records cannot vote and people interested in records usually do not effectively lobby on their behalf.

Town hall meeting attendees suggested several ways to make records more of a priority for city and county administrators. These include education on the importance of records, the establishment of an organization at the county level to serve as an advocate for local public records, legislation mandating records management activities, and the availability of additional sources of outside funding for local government records management activities.

Before resource allocators in cities and counties will make the management of local government records a priority, they must be convinced of the importance of these records. Town hall meeting attendees argue that this sort of information should be sent to county supervisors, city council members, city and county attorneys, and city and county department heads. In addition to sending information on the importance of public records, education could also focus on the cost benefits of a well-managed city/county records program. City and county administrators need to be persuaded that records management is good business and promotes economy and efficiency in government. Administrators also need to be informed about the potential legal liabilities of not having a records management program. Meeting attendees suggested that it might be useful to involve the legal community in this education effort. They also requested that the California State Archives consider preparing a model presentation containing educational information about the benefits of records management and making this presentation available to government staff and organizations at the local level via the California State Archives web page on the Secretary of State's web site.

A second method suggested at the town hall meetings is the revival of the county historical records commissions. The California Government Code, section no. 26490, created these commissions in 1974 to advise county boards of supervisors on records

issues. In some counties these boards were independent commissions, in other counties, the functions of the historical records commissions, as defined by the Government Code, were assumed by an already existing commission. In these counties, actions related to records generally held a lower priority than other types of commission activities, such as those related to parks and recreation or historic preservation. The advisory function of the commissions tended to weaken their effectiveness, since the enabling legislation did not give them the power to implement their recommendations. As a result, the commissions were only effective in counties in which they were “preaching to the choir,” because their county supervisors already believed in the importance and value of the county’s historical records. In most of California’s counties, however, the supervisors cared little about county records and ignored their commission’s recommendations. As a result, the historical records commissions lost their momentum and very few of them are now active. For approximately fifteen years the State Archives and the State Library co-sponsored an annual meeting for historical records commission representatives in Sacramento to facilitate the exchange of ideas and information. The annual meetings ended in the early 1990s, partly due to the economic recession and partly due to the loss of momentum of the commissions. It is clear that the potential of the historical records commissions was never realized. If the enabling legislation that created the commissions were revised so that their responsibilities were clearly defined and they served an oversight role, rather than merely an advisory role, the commissions could serve a useful purpose at the county level as advocates for records management and archives.

The strengthening of the records commission enabling legislation was only one of the pieces of legislation discussed at the regional town hall meetings. The California Public Records Act also received attention. Currently, the California Public Records Act has a number of weaknesses. The main focus of the act is to ensure that the public has access to government records, but the definition of records that are open to the public or confidential varies among agencies. The act also makes no provision for opening closed records once a period of time has passed and all subject individuals are deceased. Confidential records remain confidential forever, even if they have great historical significance. Another weakness is its silence on historical records. No protection for the historical records of local government is written into the Public Records Act, so cities and counties are free to dispose of these records once the legal retention period has passed. The act is also silent on the issues associated with electronic records, so these easily deleted records are at risk. Town hall attendees argued that well-crafted records legislation would encourage local government administrators to make records management a priority. A number of attendees believed that such legislation should clearly define public records and provide guidance on their retention, mandate a statute of limitations for confidential records, define and mandate protection for historical and electronic records, and mandate storage standards for local government records. Revising the Public Records Act is a controversial issue, however, since most cities and counties would not support such legislation. At the very least, the state would need to seek the support of affected constituencies such as the City Clerks Association of California and county boards of supervisors. Representatives of cities and counties also insist that strengthened records legislation would need to be accompanied by the funding necessary to implement new mandates at the local level.

In addition to needing funding to support any new legislative mandates, local government representatives also agreed that funding was needed to support records management projects by cities and counties. Town hall meeting representatives suggested that the CHRAB consider establishing a regrant program to provide such funding. Under this program, the Board would obtain grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, or another appropriate agency, and use the grant funds to support records management and archives programs at the local level. Regrant funding would function as seed-money to assist local government agencies with their records needs. While regrant funds would not be enough to hire a consultant to conduct a records management inventory or historical records survey in city and county departments, such funds could allow local governments to hire a consultant to plan and oversee such an inventory/survey. Regrant funds could also be used to hire consultants to conduct records management and archival needs assessments. Cities and counties might even use such regrants to obtain records management and archival training for their staff by sending them to the Western Archives Institute or extension courses at local colleges.

In fact, in response to the question asking which records management services local governments would like the state to provide, 74% (189 of 256) of cities and counties stated they would like the state to provide information about archives and records management. An additional 70% (179) of respondents asked for training and education. Clearly, cities and counties prefer to train their staff so that they can independently (and competently) manage their own records, rather than having records management tasks provided by an outside agency, such as the state. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that only slightly over one third of the respondents wanted the state to undertake the actual work of records management by managing files or by inventorying, scheduling, digitizing, or storing city and county records. The least popular services were forms management (16%) and microfilming of records (22%). The two exceptions were in the areas of records preservation/restoration and records appraisal. In these two cases, cities and counties would like the state to actually provide the services, not just train local government staff to preserve and appraise records. It is likely that 56% (144) of respondents would like the state to provide records preservation and restoration services, while 51% (130) would like the state to appraise city and county records for historical value, because conducting these two activities requires years of specialized education and training. Neither a two-week institute nor a college extension course can teach even the basics of records preservation/restoration or records appraisal.

The perception of local government appears to be that other records management tasks can be more easily taught and do not require extensive specialized education and training. Approximately two thirds of respondents would not like the state to manage files and forms; microfilm and digitize records; and inventory, schedule, and store records for local governments. Given the responses to questions asked by the survey regarding these areas of records management, however, it is obvious that many local governments need a great deal of information, training, and advice to adequately prepare retention and disposition schedules, microfilm and digitize records, and manage electronic records.

Retention and Disposition Schedules

The records retention and disposition schedule is the primary tool for efficiently managing local government records and remaining in compliance with city, county, state, and federal laws and regulations. According to the survey, only 113 of the 256 responding cities and counties actively work on scheduling their records for retention and disposition, although 217 of the respondents stated that they had schedules. Of these, 119 indicated that they had revised their schedules, while 18 were in the process of revising the schedules. Only 59 respondents, however, revise their schedules every one-to-five years. Another 28 respondents revise their schedules every six-or-more years, as needed, or per statutes. 107 cities and counties stated that 100% of their records had been scheduled; 89 stated that more than 50% of their records had been scheduled; and 60 stated that 50% or fewer of their records had been scheduled (20 of 256 respondents had not scheduled any records). This means that approximately 58% of the respondents do not have all of their records scheduled and an additional 23% have fewer than half their records scheduled. A related problem is that only a minority (28%) of the cities and counties that have schedules have a plan in place to periodically revise their schedules.

Another concern is that a sizable minority of schedules do not identify the vital records of city and county government, while the majority of schedules do not identify historical records. 133 respondents (52%) have schedules that identify vital records, while 103 (40% of respondents) have schedules that identify historical records. This means that vital government records needed to secure the rights of cities and counties and to permit these agencies to continue functioning during and following a disaster are not being adequately identified and protected. It also means that the historical records that document the development of government programs and activities are not adequately identified and protected. Records not identified as vital or historical/permanent on records retention and disposition schedules are at risk, because they are not marked for special treatment and may thus be inadvertently destroyed.

A records retention and disposition schedule is only as good as the information on which it is based. In order for schedules to be accurate and complete, they must be based on a recently completed or updated inventory of an agency's active records. It is not enough to adopt schedules prepared by other agencies or based on retention recommendations by a state archives or a professional association, since no agency creates and maintains exactly the same records series as another. Generalized records retention and disposition schedules are also inadequate, because each city and county has its own history and political culture that impacts the length of retention periods. While 158 cities and counties stated that they had inventoried their records, only 79 had done so in the past ten years (54 of the inventories were completed in the past five years). The remaining 79 respondents had last inventoried their records between eleven and thirty-six years ago. Another group of 67 respondents stated that they had never inventoried their records. Since 236 respondents claimed to have scheduled at least some portion of their records, only 158 (67%) of them based those schedules on inventories of their records. These respondents most likely adapted schedules created for other agencies or based

them on a generalized set of retention guidelines available from a professional association.

At the regional records town hall meetings, representatives of California's local governments raised two additional issues affecting their records programs. These were the need for retention and disposition guidelines for government records and easy access to better records management education. Attendees at each of the 8 town hall meetings discussed the need for help in creating retention and disposition schedules for their cities' and counties' records. At present, local governments that wish to schedule their records are required to undertake many hours of legal research in city, county, state, and federal laws and regulations. The only alternative is to adopt and adapt the already existing schedules of other local government agencies. Since each city and county has some unique records series, as well as a unique history and "culture," this usually does not work well. Using schedules prepared for other agencies also presents the same problem as copying another student's test paper – you cannot be sure that the answers are correct. Cities and counties have no way of knowing how accurate and complete the legal research was that resulted in the schedules they are adapting for their own use. Meeting attendees suggested that one way to solve this problem and to help them prepare and update retention and disposition schedules would be for the California State Archives to conduct the necessary legal research and then to publish retention guidelines for city and county records. Local governments would then have some level of confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the recommended retention guidelines. Cities and counties would still have to inventory their departmental records and schedule their unique records. They would also have to change some retention periods due to local ordinances and needs. However, the bulk of their retention schedules could be prepared without conducting legal research, thus saving both staff time and money. The retention guidelines prepared by the State Archives could be published in print format and/or be posted on the State Archives' web page on the California Secretary of State's web site.

Town hall meeting attendees also suggested that the State Archives' web page could be used to educate local government staff involved in records management activities. According to the survey, most respondents receive records management information and assistance from professional associations (141), colleagues (137), or vendors (59). Professional associations, such as the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA), and colleagues can be valuable sources of information. Vendor information is problematic, however, since a vendor has a vested interest in a particular product that may or may not be appropriate in a given situation. The State Archives could provide useful information for the state's records managers, since it is both objective and familiar with the history and records of California's cities and counties.

Although only 34 survey respondents stated that they turned to a state agency for assistance, town hall meeting attendees were vocal about their belief that the State Archives should assume a role in providing unbiased and credible records management information to California's local governments. The types of information town hall meeting attendees suggested would be useful include print and/or web-based materials such as a glossary of records management and archives terms and bibliographies of

records management, archives, and related literature. Attendees also stated that they would welcome the creation of a web site operated by the State Archives that would operate as a clearinghouse of records management/archives guidelines, best practices, model programs, standards, innovations developed elsewhere, and links to expanded information. This web site could also provide online workshops and distance education programs in records and archives management.

Microfilming and Digitization

Microfilming of government records has long been an integral component of vital records and preservation programs. Microfilming allows government agencies to store vital records off-site and in more than one place cost-effectively, so that agencies can continue operating during an emergency or resume operations after an emergency. Microfilming is also a useful preservation tool, since it enables agencies to produce duplicates of historical records, as well as to save storage space and costs. For fragile historical records, microfilm duplicates can be used to provide access to information while saving wear and tear on the records themselves. For records that contain historically significant information, but do not have intrinsic value, microfilming on silver halide film allows government agencies to preserve the information in a microfilm duplicate of the record, while destroying the original and thus saving many linear/cubic feet of storage space. Microfilming works well for this purpose, since its longevity when properly processed, stored, and monitored is second only to paper. Another advantage is that microfilm can be accessed with the naked eye aided only by a magnifying glass, should there be a power outage during a disaster.

In recent years, some cities and counties have chosen to duplicate their records by digitizing them, rather than by microfilming them. Digitization has several advantages over microfilming, but it also has significant disadvantages. A digitized version of a record not only duplicates every aspect of the original record, including color, it can even be an improvement over the original record, in that faint markings can be enhanced and stains minimized. Access and storage are also benefits of digitization, since digitized records require no floor space for storage, other than that required by the computer needed to access the records. Access is as easy as pulling the record's image up on the computer screen. If the file that contains the digitized record is stored on a local area network it can be accessed by any network user, thus saving the time otherwise needed to locate and retrieve an original record or a reel of microfilm. A digitized record also can be easily made available to outside users on the Internet. For records that need to be made widely available, digitization is a good choice. It is also a good, albeit expensive, choice for vital records programs, since electronic versions of the vital records can be efficiently stored off-site.

While digitization can be a useful tool for providing access to the temporary records of local governments, it is not appropriate for the preservation of permanent records due to the limited and uncertain lifespans of electronic media and the ever-changing hardware and software used to produce them. Floppy disks have a lifespan of only five-to-ten years and the longevity of CD ROMs varies by brand and is dependent

on the production environment of each batch, as well as on the storage environment. The hardware and software needed to access the data stored on floppy disks or CDs has been even more transitory than the disks and CDs. Even as few as ten years ago, most cities and counties were using the DOS operating system and word processing, database, and spreadsheet programs that required textual commands. Most governments now work in a Windows environment, but that environment is constantly being upgraded, as are the computers on which it operates. Given this constant state of transition in electronic media, it is not safe to assume that records digitized today will be accessible five or ten years from now without some level of data loss. Even a vigilant program of data migration does not solve this problem, since any change from the technology used to create the data (digitized record) will likely result in some change to the data (record). If the goal is to preserve a permanent record and retain all its original information, digitization is not the appropriate choice. For the permanent preservation of historically significant information, microfilm is a better choice due to its greater longevity and lesser dependence on technology.

223 cities and counties in California currently microfilm and/or digitize records as part of vital records programs or to preserve historical information. The types of records microfilmed/digitized by government agencies include city council and board of supervisor minutes, reports, ordinances, and resolutions; contracts and agreements; legal files; planning and public works files; police and sheriff case files and reports; planning and public works files, maps, and plans; building department plans and permits; vital records; property records; survey records; payroll and financial records; personnel and medical records; tax records; and numerous other permanent or vital records. 76 of the cities and counties contract with a vendor for their microfilming, while 25 contract with one for digitizing records.

Cities and counties appear to use microfilm and digital images to duplicate the same types of records; with some microfilming exclusively, others digitizing exclusively, and still others using both methods. The only obvious, although slight, difference is that a few local governments tend to microfilm if the goal is to preserve permanent records and digitize if the goal is to provide access. This difference, however, is not clear-cut, as some cities and counties appear to have replaced their microfilming program with a digitization program, probably under the assumption that both technologies serve the same purpose and that digitization is more versatile. In fact, digitization and microfilming are not interchangeable and digitization is not an appropriate technology for the preservation of permanent records.

42 cities and counties destroy their original records after they are microfilmed or digitized. If the microfilm or digitized images are examined to ensure that the quality and completeness of the duplicates meets quality standards and if the digitized records are temporary, then this procedure is appropriate. In a number of cities and counties, however, original records are destroyed without checking that the duplicates are of good quality and complete; sometimes in as few as two weeks after digitization/microfilming. This places the information in duplicated records at risk. The examples of poorly filmed and processed, and thus illegible, microfilm are legion. One reason for this is that only 38

of the cities and counties responding to the survey film their permanent records using silver halide film (the archival standard due to its relative permanence). While digitization is still relatively new, the digital process requires quality assurance, just as does microfilming. To ensure that duplicate government records are preserved as long as is required by local, state, and federal laws and regulations, cities and counties must make quality assurance a regular step in their microfilming and digitizing procedures. While microfilming standards have been generally agreed upon for many years, this is not the case for digitization standards. Such standards for the digitization/scanning of documents are only now being developed and a universally-accepted standard is not yet available. In California, the California State Library has developed a set of scanning standards which local governments may wish to consider using to ensure that their digitization activities meet certain minimum requirements. It would help to further the use of digitization standards if the State Archives made these standards available on their web page. In addition to conducting scanning activities in compliance with an accepted set of standards, cities and counties must also regularly and routinely monitor the microfilmed and digitized records to ensure that they remain in good condition. If the condition of these record duplicates begins to deteriorate, they must be immediately refiled or rescanned. Only 47 cities and counties indicated on the survey that they periodically monitor their microfilm for physical deterioration.

In addition to proper processing and monitoring, cities and counties should also store copies of their master negatives for microfilm and digitized images of vital and permanent records in a secure off-site facility. In the event of a disaster, the original records and onsite access copies may be lost, but the information will still exist and be retrievable. Approximately half of the respondents (102 of 223) currently store security copies of their microfilmed and digitized records offsite.

Electronic Records

The management of electronic records presents several of the same issues as does records digitization, since digitized records are electronic records. The two major problems cities and counties face when dealing with electronic records are setting appropriate retention periods and ensuring that the records remain accessible throughout the length of their retention period.

An electronic record, including electronic messages (email), is just as much a record as is a paper or audiovisual record. The length of a record's retention period is independent of its format and is determined by local, state, and federal laws and regulations. When a record exists in both electronic and paper formats, the retention period will depend on which is the official record. Despite the fact that records in electronic format are records like all others, they are at more risk of premature destruction than are paper or audiovisual records. One explanation for the added risk electronic records face is that many government employees do not perceive documents in electronic format as "records." They see them instead as transitory information or as drafts to be deleted at will. Some employees believe that the records created on their computer are "their" records, not the county's or city's records and are thus not subject to

the provisions of the agency's retention and disposition schedules. Neither of these perceptions are fact and local government employees need to be convinced that the records created on their computers are public records and must be treated as such.

Electronic records are also at risk, because cities and counties have outdated retention and disposition schedules that make no mention of them. During the past five-to-ten years the volume of electronic records has increased exponentially. During this same period, only 71 of the 217 respondents who stated they had retention schedules had updated their schedules. The logical conclusion given these two facts is that most local government retention and disposition schedules were completed before electronic records became a major factor in government.

Even in cities and counties that have up-to-date retention schedules that explicitly deal with electronic records, these records are often at risk. The reason is that access to electronic records is dependent on technology. If the technology changes, access becomes problematic, if not impossible. The issue of technological obsolescence and its effect on records access is not new, but it is more of a concern than in the past, because the rate at which obsolescence occurs has become much more rapid. To ensure that electronic records created today can be read five years from now, cities and counties must establish a regular program of data migration. As discussed above, this will not solve the problem entirely, but it increases the odds that most electronic records will be accessible throughout their entire retention period, especially if the retention period is lengthy or if the records are permanent.

Historical Records

The historical records of local governments raise many of the same concerns as temporary records, only to a greater extent, since they must be retained permanently. Some historical records can be reformatted (i.e., microfilmed) to reduce storage costs, while for others, the originals must be retained. Whether reformatted, or in the original format, historical records present three major issues for local governments: 1.) identification, 2.) storage, and 3.) public access.

Appraisal is the process of determining the intellectual value of records. All records of local government have primary values that make them important to their creating agencies and secondary values that make them significant to researchers. Primary values are used to set the length of the retention period and include administrative, fiscal, legal, and operating values. Secondary values (often called "historical value") are used to determine the appropriate disposition of the records. These include evidential value and informational value. Records with evidential value provide evidence of the organization and functions of the originating agency, while records with informational value contain information on persons, issues, things, phenomena, and events. Ideally, appraisal to determine whether records have historical value should occur when the records are created. Some records series such as city council minutes or resolutions clearly have historical value. For other records series, appraisal is not so clear cut. In these cases, the majority of local governments without archivists or historians on

staff are often unsure which records have historical value and which do not. This situation creates two potential problems. The more serious of these is the danger in which it places historical records. If the historical value of records is not identified, the records will improperly be designated as temporary records, when in fact they should be identified as permanent. These records may then be discarded under the erroneous assumption that they have no permanent value. The opposite situation may also arise in which temporary records are mistakenly thought to have long term or permanent value and are retained far longer than necessary, thus taking up much needed and expensive storage space that should be devoted to permanent records.

Town hall meeting attendees articulated a number of questions related to the appraisal of historical records. They were unsure whether the records they were saving were actually historical and thus feared that they might be saving too few or too many records, or perhaps even the wrong types of records. City and county staff also expressed confusion about whether it is a record's medium or its content that lends it historical value. Meeting attendees agreed that the CHRAB and the State Archives should provide assistance to local governments in this area. They suggested that the State Archives provide them with information about how to identify historical records. This information could take a number of different forms. The most popular action would be for the State Archives to provide appraisal guidelines by reprinting the 1981 report on the "Identification of the Historical Records of County Government in California." Prior to reprinting, this report should be updated and expanded to include information on identifying the historical records of both county and city government. While the report could be printed and distributed in hard copy, as it was in 1981; the State Archives should also consider making the report available as a PDF file on their web page. Another type of assistance would be for the State Archives to offer regional or online workshops on the process of records appraisal.

Once historical records have been identified, they must be retained permanently either in their original format or in another format such as microfilm. The preservation of permanent historical records is a major issue for cities and counties. Most lack knowledge about how historical records should be handled and stored. The state could help solve this problem by offering information on archives management and preservation through regional basic archives workshops and print and online preservation guidelines. The workshops and written information could educate local government staff about how to store and handle different types of records (paper documents, bound volumes, oversize materials, audiovisual materials, and electronic media). Guidelines for the proper storage of historical materials would be helpful both for cities and counties that store their records onsite and for those that store their materials offsite at a vendor facility. This suggestion was made by one town hall meeting attendee, who requested that the state provide criteria that must be met by offsite storage vendors to ensure the preservation of records stored there.

A more serious problem than a lack of information is the fact that most cities and counties have neither the staff (in-house or contract) with specialized education and training nor the specialized storage facilities needed to adequately preserve historical

records. Only a handful of cities and counties have archivists on staff or hire them on a contract basis. The storage situation is only slightly more positive. 43% of the survey respondents state that historical records receive no special care measures in their cities and counties. The remaining respondents provide some specialized storage for their historical records, with the limitation of light (25% of respondents) and the use of acid-free storage containers and enclosures (26%) being the most popular. 20% also provide temperature control, usually by means of an air conditioning system that is on during business hours. Only 13% provide humidity control and storage equipment that meets archival standards. Air filtration is present in only 5% of city and county historical records storage areas. Without increased administrative support within cities and counties and the increased funding that would logically follow from the increased support, there is no obvious solution to improper historical records storage conditions in cities and counties. One county has considered the creative idea of joining with the county's cities to establish a regional archives facility that would house records from numerous jurisdictions. For a variety of reasons which were discussed above, most of the cities contacted were not interested in this idea.

Inadequate management and storage of historical records affects not only the condition of the records, but also their ease of access. It can take hours of staff-time to find records for researchers or local government staff members, if those records are not logically arranged (i.e., in alphabetical, chronological, or numerical order) or are stored in substandard areas with no real order. Under these conditions, public research requests can be quite burdensome for city and county staff. Electronic records do not present the same storage and access concerns as paper records, but they offer challenges of another sort. One aspect of providing access to public records is making document copies available to researchers. While most local governments developed fee structures for copies of microfilmed records and paper records many years ago, they have not yet developed such structures for computer-generated copies or for electronic records copied to a disk or sent as an email attachment.

Access also presents a variety of challenges to public researchers. Since most cities and counties do not have inventories of their historical records and since the records are dispersed in a variety of city and county facilities, it is often very difficult to locate them. The most obvious solution to this problem would be the preparation of an inventory of historical records in each of California's cities and counties. Such a massive undertaking would require a great deal of funding, however, and would not solve the larger problem presented by poor storage facilities. Historical records are often stored in attics, basements, closets, and other out-of-the-way and substandard storage areas. Some of these storage areas are so disorganized and ill-kept that they present a risk not only to the records stored there, but also to local government staff or members of the public who go there to retrieve or view records. Again, the logical solution of finding or constructing better storage facilities for historical records is dependent on the availability of funding.

RECORDS ISSUES IN CALIFORNIA'S HISTORICAL RECORDS REPOSITORIES

California's historical records repositories face essentially the same issues as those that face California's local governments. Representatives of both historical repositories and local governments state that poor administrative support, staff, space, and funding are problems. They also identify a lack of education and information about historical records identification, preservation, storage, and access as problems. Historical repositories are just as concerned as local governments about public records preservation and access issues, especially as these relate to changing records-keeping technologies. Unlike local governments which share similar concerns, regardless of their size and of whether they are cities or counties, historical repositories of different types tend to emphasize different concerns. Historical records programs that represent one of several functions for their institutions may focus on different concerns, than historical records programs which are the primary function of their institutions (i.e., they are concerned about administrative support, as opposed to being concerned about gaining outside funding). About half of the respondents (116) stated that the historical records program is the primary function of their institutions.

Historical records programs in California represent a variety of institution types, including museums (27.5% of respondents), public libraries (22%), colleges/universities (19%), historical repositories (17%), federal or state agency repositories (8%), religious repositories (4.5%), and corporate repositories (2%). Survey respondents work at institutions established between 1849 and 1996. Collectively, the responding historical records repositories in California house 247,737 cubic/linear feet (and/or 49,023,668 items) of historical records. Of the 244 historical records repositories who responded to this survey, 229 currently hold paper records, 218 hold photographs, 217 hold bound volumes and/or pamphlets, 177 hold maps and/or plats, 161 hold audiotapes, 160 hold videotapes, 136 hold architectural drawings and/or blueprints, 120 hold microfilm and/or microfiche, 112 hold motion picture film, 70 hold computer media, and 11 hold optical disks. Depending on the type of materials, between 39% and 91% of repositories actively continue to collect additional materials of the types they now hold.

These collective historical records repository holdings represent materials dating from 200 BC to the present, although the bulk of the materials date from the early 1800s to the present. The holdings represent a wide variety of subject areas, but local history (broadly conceived) is the most popular collecting area. Other popular collecting areas include Native Americans, genealogy, agriculture, education, water rights and resource development, business/industry/manufacturing, and transportation and communication.

The significance of the collections held by California's historical records repositories cannot be overstated. Without these collections, the history of California's peoples, places, and events could not be written or understood. These records represent California's documentary heritage and, as such, they deserve proper care.

Administrative Support

As is the case in California's local governments, many of California's historical records repositories lack sufficient administrative support. This is especially the case for

repositories that are only one part of a larger organization whose primary mission is not the preservation of historical records. In such organizations, the repository staff must often educate administrators and resource allocators to understand and support historical records preservation needs. Smaller stand-alone repositories at the community level face a variation of this problem, in that much of their support comes from the community and, in some cases, their local governments. Thus they are also required to educate resource allocators and potential donors in their communities. Repositories that lack administrative support, whether it is from within the repository's own organization or from the outside community, face serious problems since a lack of administrative support usually translates into a lack of funding. As a result, such repositories are usually unable to afford the necessary staffing and facilities to properly care for their historical records. Town hall meeting attendees verified this conclusion by stating that their repositories lack the funding to hire additional staff of any kind, much less trained archivists to manage, process, and preserve their collections.

Staffing

Town hall meeting attendees suggested several possible sources of additional trained staff for historical records repositories, including interns, consultants, or archivists shared by several repositories. Many of California's historical records repositories have used university interns to process or complete other work with their historical records. Such interns are usually enrolled in graduate programs in history, public history, or library science. Interns can provide valuable assistance to historical records repositories, but this assistance comes with limitations. Most interns have little or no practical experience working with archival materials. Many interns also have little or no knowledge of archival theory. In short, they can provide extra hands for the short-staffed repository, but to utilize interns without also providing for their training and close supervision by an experienced archivist is asking for trouble. Nor is such a practice fair to the interns themselves, since the whole purpose of an archival internship is to provide students with practical experience under the watchful eyes of experienced archivists. For historical records repositories that do not have experienced archivists on staff to supervise interns, interns are not an appropriate source of additional staff – not even if they are free.

Town hall meeting attendees suggested archival consultants as a second source of trained staff. In cases where repositories are faced with a limited-term project or require intellectual input to identify the parameters of an archival problem or for advice on how to establish or operate a historical records program, consultants are often the best choice. The major impediment preventing most repositories from hiring consultants is their cost. Meeting attendees suggested that this problem could be eliminated in several ways. One possible solution would be for the State Archives to designate staff that could function as field consultants and travel to repositories and local governments in order to conduct archival needs assessments and provide advice. These archivists would also be charged with responding to telephone calls from historical repositories and local governments requesting advice. It is highly unlikely that the State Archives could provide field staff to conduct actual archival work, such as collections processing, however, because the expense would be prohibitive. Another suggestion was for the CHRAB to provide grants

that would allow historical records repositories to hire archival consultants. Again, such funding might permit the hiring of consultants to conduct needs assessments, but would certainly not extend far enough to allow consultants to process records. Both archival field staff visits and grants for the hiring of consultants would be particularly helpful to the many small, local repositories that are operated solely by volunteers. These repositories almost never have the funds to hire consultants, much less professional staff, but at the same time, they need such help more than most other repositories.

A third suggestion for providing repositories with the professional staff they need was that repositories located in proximity to one another share an archivist. The concept of the “circuit-riding archivist” was implemented in the early 1990s by three northern California cities. The shared archivist was initially funded through a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, but the expiration of the grant coincided with an economic recession that prevented the three cities from continuing to fund the archivist’s position over the long term. Obviously even a third of an archivist is seen as expendable during hard times. Although implementation of the circuit-riding archivist concept proved temporary the first time, the idea retains merit and deserves consideration by local historical records repositories.

In addition to needing trained archivists on staff, many of California’s historical records repositories need additional staff at all levels. Staffing in California’s historical records repositories consists of a combination of paid professional staff, paid non-professional staff, paid and unpaid interns, and volunteers. 21% of responding repositories have only one part-time paid professional staff member, while 34% have one or two paid professional staff members. 9% of repositories employ between three and ten professional-level staff. Only 2% of the responding repositories employ more than ten professional-level staff (one repository employs 50). Many of these repositories also have non-professional paid employees, interns, and/or volunteers to assist the professional-level staff, although 9% are operated entirely by one full-or part-time professional-level staff member (the so-called “lone arranger”). 33% of the 244 responding repositories have no paid professional staff and 18% have no paid staff of any kind.

A majority of the professional staff in California’s historical records repositories hold graduate degrees in either library/information science (34%) or in history or a related humanities discipline (31%). Only 10% received their graduate degree in archival administration (usually this means a graduate degree in library science or public history with an emphasis/minor in archives). 22% of paid staff members (both professional and non-professional) received their training in the management of historical records by attending a one or two week institute in archival management and methods, while 35% received their training in one or two day archival administration and methods workshops. 17% of paid staff have received no specialized training in the care of historical records.

Given that only 10% of paid professional staff in California’s historical records repositories has a graduate degree in archival administration, it is understandable that most repositories believe their staff members and volunteers would benefit from additional training. The area in which the highest number of responding repositories

request education and training is preservation/conservation, with training in the use of computers in archives coming in a close second. Responding repositories would also like their staff members to receive training in archival methods (i.e., processing and description) and in electronic records. The education priorities listed by responding repositories indicate that while staff members continue to need training in the traditional archival skills, they now also need to learn how to automate certain archival functions and how to care for electronic media. Far fewer repositories identified a need for training in disaster preparedness, records management, appraisal, or outreach. Were repositories responding to the survey now (rather than prior to September 11), it is likely that disaster preparedness training would be considered a higher priority.

In addition to prioritizing their training needs, repositories were also asked to identify their preferred training delivery method. 75% of respondents chose one or two day workshops as the best method of providing additional training for their staffs. This was by far the most popular response, probably because it is the least expensive training method in terms of both staff time and cost. The next most popular training methods were publications/printed training manuals (46%) and on-the-job training (45%). Approximately one third of respondents viewed training by archival consultants (32%) and attendance at one or two week archival institutes (29%) as desirable methods for providing their staff with additional training. Respondents identified graduate courses in archival administration and internships as their least popular training methods. No doubt, the unpopularity of these two training methods rests on the extensive commitment of time and money required to take advantage of them. Only 3% of responding repositories stated that their staffs did not need or desire additional training.

Storage Facilities

The majority of California's historical records repositories have as great a problem providing adequate and appropriate storage facilities and equipment for their historical records collections as they do hiring enough trained and experienced staff. Town hall meeting attendees cited the lack of adequately sized, secure, and climate controlled storage space as a major problem. Repositories that do not have enough or the right kind of space to hold their collections find it difficult to continue adding new historical materials. They also fear that their existing historical collections will deteriorate beyond usability due to poor storage conditions.

Historical records repositories in California store their historical records in a variety of storage areas, with most repositories storing records in more than one type of space. 63% respondents store their records in storage rooms, 59% store records in library or archives stack areas, 52% store records in office areas, 18% store records in attics or basements and an additional 43 store records in closets or cupboards. 15% store records in a warehouse, 4% store records in a vault or fireproof room, and 1% store records in a historic structure or a residence. Given the general state of attics, basements, closets, cupboards, and historic houses, it seems fair to conclude that the majority of California's historic records are stored under substandard conditions. This is especially the case, since a majority of office areas, warehouses, and library and archives stack areas also do not

meet minimum archival standards in such areas as security and climate controls. Only 37% of responding repositories have their records storage facility equipped with year-round temperature controls (30% regulate the temperature in no part of their facility, while another third of respondents control the temperature in some portion of their facility). This does not necessarily mean that 37% of repositories meet archival standards for temperature control. It is important to remember that having year-round temperature controls is not synonymous with having a facility whose temperature is maintained at optimum levels (between 65°F and 68°F) for records preservation 24 hours per day and 365 days per year. Humidity controls are much less common in California's repositories than temperature controls, partly because California rarely experiences high humidity during warm months. 50% of responding repositories have no humidity controls. Only 16% control the humidity throughout their facility year-round; while 19% control the humidity in some portion of their facility year-round. Again, there is no way of knowing whether the humidity is maintained at optimum levels 24 hours per day and 365 days per year by that top 16%. Fire detection and security systems, such as locks and motion detectors, are the most common special equipment found in the storage areas of historical records repositories. 59% and 57%, respectively, have storage areas equipped with fire detection and security systems. The more surprising statistic is that 41% and 43%, respectively, of repositories in California have only some or no portion of their storage areas equipped with fire detection and security systems. Fire suppression, such as sprinkler or Halon systems, is slightly more common in repository storage areas than temperature controls. 36% of responding repositories have fire suppression systems in their storage areas, while another 36% have no fire suppression systems. The remaining repositories have a portion of their storage area equipped with fire suppression systems.

The quality of the storage space is largely dependent on funding, but it is also dependent on the availability of good information about what constitutes standard archival storage. Repository representatives stated that a lack of storage standards and guidelines made it difficult to know how they should store their historical materials. They suggested that the State Archives web page should contain such information.

Funding

Town hall meeting attendees indicated that obtaining sufficient funding is a major problem for them and presents an impediment to all aspects of repository operations. The survey requested repository budget information from responding repositories. Of 244 responses, 122 provided the requested information. Although the sample is too small to allow for any solid conclusions, certain preliminary inferences are possible. The majority of repositories (56%) have an annual budget of less than \$10,000. Repositories with this level of funding would be unable to hire professional (or any) full time staff. They would have difficulty paying rent on a facility, paying utility bills, buying storage equipment, or buying storage supplies such as acid-free enclosures and containers. In short, they would only be able to operate with volunteer labor and in donated space. An additional 22% of repositories operate with a yearly budget in the \$10,000 to \$100,000 range. Depending on where in the range a repository falls, this level of funding might enable the repository to rent space, pay for utilities, hire one or two full-time staff members (perhaps one

professional and one non-professional), and buy appropriate storage equipment and supplies. An additional 22% of responding repositories operate with an annual budget greater than \$100,000. Most of California's historical records repositories should be able to operate well at this level of funding, however some of the larger facilities would need additional funds to adequately store, process, and provide access to their collections.

Historical records repositories receive their funding from a variety of sources, including the repository's parent institution, federal and local government grants, private and foundation grants, endowments and trusts, the state government, local governments, and fundraising activities. 53% of the responding repositories receive at least some funding from their parent organizations, making this the largest single source of funding for most repositories. 5% of repositories receive funding from federal and local government grants. 13% repositories receive private or foundation grants. 5% of repositories benefit from endowment or trust funds. 6% of repositories receive funding from the state. 7% of repositories receive funding from their local governments. Fundraising activities provide funding for 22% of responding repositories. Based on these statistics, it is clear that the major sources of funding for California's historical records repositories are those provided by parent institutions to repositories that are part of their organizations, by state government to state-operated repositories, by local governments to community repositories, and by the fundraising activities of the repositories themselves. For most repositories, grants provide only supplemental or special project funding, rather than general operational funding.

The survey also asked respondents whether their budgets had increased, decreased, kept pace with inflation, or remained unchanged during the past three years. Only 6% of repositories experienced budget decreases during this period. The budgets of 32% of repositories increased above inflation, while an additional 16% saw increases that kept pace with inflation. The budgets of the remaining 46% of repositories remained unchanged. Respondents' answers to this question indicate that the past three years have been more positive than negative for the historical records repository community. It is important to note, however, that despite the few repositories that saw reduced budgets, survey responses still show that 52% of repositories experienced a net loss in their operating funds.

When asked whether they expected their budgets to increase beyond inflation during the next three years, 28% of repositories stated that they expected increased funding, while 72% stated they did not. This statistic is somewhat misleading, because it might mean that these 72% of repositories expect to keep pace with inflation or that they expect to have their budgets cut. At the time the survey was sent out, the economy in California had begun to slow significantly, so either interpretation is reasonable. Given the effects of the September 11 attacks on the economy, it is likely that repositories' budgetary expectations might now be much more negative. Historically, economic slowdowns have had a significant negative effect on historical records repositories and it is to be expected that this will again be the case. With possible funding cuts on the horizon for California's historical records repositories, identifying existing sources of funding and creating new ones will be an increasingly important task for repositories. The

regrant program discussed above would be particularly helpful for volunteer-operated small community repositories funded solely through fundraising activities. Small grants from CHRAB would allow these organizations to accomplish tasks that would otherwise be impossible, such as hiring an archival consultant to advise them or purchasing acid-free storage materials for their collections.

Education and Information

Access to historical records related education and information is the second greatest need in California's historical records repositories after the need for administrative support that leads to additional staff, space, and funds. Repositories particularly desire continuing education and information about the management and preservation of historical records, about encouraging access to their own collections and obtaining access to public records in their local communities, and about understanding and keeping up with changing records-keeping technologies. As is the case for California's local governments, California's historical records repositories seek this information primarily from colleagues (71% of respondents), professional organizations (43%), or vendors (32%). 16% of respondents also turn either to agencies of the state or federal government. 14% hire paid consultants for advice, while 9% turn to local government agencies. The least popular sources of information about historical records issues are printed materials (used by 6% of respondents), the archives and records management listservs (5%), and the CHRAB (4%).

Management of Historical Records

Managing and preserving historical records in accordance with archival standards is a concern for all historical records repositories, but it is particularly a concern for many of California's smaller community historical records repositories and for organizations that hold historical records but whose major function is not historical records management. These are the same organizations that are likely to find it difficult to acquire funding, trained staff, and appropriate storage facilities. Representatives of these organizations who attended the town hall meetings stated that they are in need of credible and affordable sources of archival information and for educating their staffs in various aspects of archival management.

In addition to the information sources cited above, town hall meeting attendees listed many of the same types and sources of information and education as those suggested by local government representatives. Representatives of both historical records repositories and local governments recommended that the State Archives and the CHRAB should develop information in various aspects of historical records management. The State Archives/CHRAB should then make that information available via printed information packets or manuals, MS PowerPoint presentations to be shared by disk or email attachment, and online information on the State Archives web page. Repository representatives suggested numerous types of information that could be part of such an effort, including identifying historical records, records processing, preservation (especially of photographs), collections cataloging and description (i.e., information on

descriptive standards), imaging standards, sample forms, sample archives and records management policies and procedures, emergency preparedness, and cost estimates for conducting various records tasks.

Repository representatives also stated that there is a need for basic workshops in the above areas. Professional associations such as the Society of California Archivists, the California Library Association, or the California Council for the Promotion of History could offer these workshops in conjunction with their annual meetings. The State Archives or the CHRAB could also offer such workshops. In addition to basic workshops, repository representatives suggested that one appropriate use of regrant funds would be to support staff training by paying staff to attend the Western Archives Institute and university extension classes.

One survey question asked respondents to state their historical records management priorities. The highest priorities were improving collections preservation (70% in favor), increasing funding and storage space (69%), improving finding aids (68%), processing the backlog (66%), improving staff training (63%), encouraging greater use of collections (62%), improving storage conditions (59%), increasing public support of historical records (58%), and developing an automated description system (50%). Fewer than half the survey respondents ranked reformatting collections (43% in favor), developing a disaster plan (41%), increasing the commitment of the parent organization (40%), developing policies for handling new media (37%), increasing solicitation of collections (36%), introducing/improving records management (36%), or developing an acquisition policy as priorities (27%). It is probable that numerous repositories did not list certain activities they considered to be important as priorities, because they had no concerns in that area.

Preservation of Historical Records

According to the survey responses, historical records repositories in California face many of the same problems that they faced at the time of the previous survey twenty years ago. In fact, when asked to state the most pressing problem confronting their organization's historical records collection, 37% responded that it was records preservation. Most repositories have storage facilities that are without environmental controls and are subject to water damage through leaks or floods, theft due to inadequate security, and infestation by insects and vermin. Deterioration of historical records in the repositories continues to be a major concern. When asked whether they were especially concerned about the physical condition of any portion of their collections, 63% of respondents stated that they were. Collection concerns included deterioration of photographic materials, newspapers, bound volumes, audio/video materials, blueprints, drawings, maps, microfilm, moving picture film, scrapbooks, and documents. In short, every type of record is at risk somewhere in California. A number of respondents stated that they had actually lost records due to fire, water (floods and leaks), theft, misfiles, poor handling, vandalism, and a generally poor storage environment.

These expressions of concern are not surprising, since one hears them in any gathering of archivists. What is of particular concern is that so little is being done to mitigate the risks facing California's historical records. While many of California's repositories have undertaken conservation measures in the past year, these measures have primarily focused on repair after the damage has been done, rather than on preventing damage in the first place. 34% of respondents have had documents conserved or repaired, while 31% have had bound volumes repaired or rebound. 17% have microfilmed historical records, while 32% have scanned them. Considering the relatively short lifespan of digital media, scanning projects – especially if they result in the disposal of original historical records – may place historical records and their content in even greater danger than if they had been left untouched. Few respondents undertook conservation measures intended to protect and extend the lifespans of original historical records. 13% upgraded environmental controls, 5% upgraded the storage facility, 4% made preservation copies, and 1% conducted preservation assessments to plan for future preservation measures.

With the dramatic (and traumatic) example of the September 11 terrorist attacks in mind, disaster recovery planning is now an immediate concern. Only 35% of the responding repositories had disaster recovery plans in place; the remaining 65% did not. Repositories that do not have disaster recovery plans are not only at risk in case of an earthquake, flood, or attack, they are also completely unprepared to cope should future risk become present reality.

Access to Historical Records

Historical records repositories exist both to preserve records and to make them both physically and intellectually accessible to researchers. Next to records preservation, survey respondents listed access as the second most pressing problem facing their organization's historical records collection. For records to be physically accessible, the repository must be able to find them, retrieve them, and provide the researcher with space to use them. For records to be intellectually accessible, they must be organized and researchers must have access to finding aids that allow them to understand the content of the collection. Survey respondents identify impediments to access in each of these areas. 60% of repositories report a processing backlog. This means that the repositories have neither organized nor prepared finding aids for some portion of their collections. 53% report that they lack indexes or finding aids for their collections. 37% of responding repositories state that 50% or less of their collections are described in finding aids, while 63% report that 50% or more of their collections are described. 19% cannot access some portion of their collections, because they do not have the necessary equipment (i.e., microfilm/fiche readers or tape players). 11% of repositories cannot physically locate some of their materials, while 9% have records that are deteriorated beyond use. 7% of repositories do not have the space or the staff needed to allow researchers to use their collections. 2% of repositories cannot make records available because of restrictions on their use (i.e., donor-imposed restrictions).

Finding aids used by repositories to make their collections accessible to researchers are of various types. The two most common type of finding aids are the typewritten register or inventory and the in-house computer catalog or database, used by 56% and 55% of repositories respectively. 47% of repositories continue to use card catalogs, while 32% of repositories have begun to take advantage of the Internet by posting information about their collections on a website. One encouraging conclusion that can be drawn from the survey responses is that only 5% of responding repositories rely solely on the memory of their staffs to provide access to their collections.

Survey responses also provide information about the research requests received by historical records repositories. Repositories in California collectively receive approximately 15,000 requests by mail, 45,000 requests by email, 164,000 requests during in person visits, and 162,000 requests by telephone. These statistics are somewhat misleading, since only a few repositories receive more than 250 research requests each year. The majority of repositories receive 250 or fewer requests in each category per year (93% of repositories for mailed requests, 78% for emailed requests, 70% for in-person requests, and 81% for telephone requests). The types of research conducted in historical records repositories tend to fall into certain general categories including local history (89% of repositories), scholarly/publication (80%), genealogy (64%), class work (58%), administrative (52%), public relations (50%), property or legal (47%), commercial (5%), and environmental (3%). Of these research requests categories, the environmental category is the newest and has been steadily gaining in popularity over the past two decades. It is likely that a greater number of research requests pertain to environmental research than the statistics would seem to indicate, since much of the legal and property research actually relates to environmental issues.

California's historical records repositories are not only concerned about providing access to their own collections, they are also concerned about access to public records in their communities. This interest arises out of a desire to assist researchers who often need to see historical records held by historical records repositories and by local governments, as well as by the desire that the historical records of local government be preserved. Records town hall meeting representatives from both historical records repositories and from local governments shared many of the same concerns and made many of the same suggestions. Historical records repository representatives agreed with local government representatives that the California Public Records Act should be strengthened to protect the historical records of local government and that a limit should be placed on the length of time confidential records can remain closed to research. Meeting attendees from historical records repositories also urged the preparation of inventories of city and county records, so that these records can be made more accessible to researchers. Representatives of historical records repositories and local governments both emphasized how necessary it is for the public, community organizations, professional associations, and the state to support historical records preservation and access in cities and counties. Without that support, these historical records might be lost. Several representatives of historical records repositories reported an additional concern about public records related to the fact that a number of cities and counties donate inactive public historical records to local historical societies or other local historical records repositories. Several meeting

attendees stated that local governments should be prevented from donating inactive public records to private repositories, because public records should not be privatized. Representatives of those repositories which have received public records donations expressed a need for information about their responsibilities toward the government records they store and toward the public for whom they make these records accessible. They suggested that the State Archives or CHRAB should provide this information on a website or in print.

Records-Keeping Technologies

Another concern shared by representatives of local governments and historical records repositories is related to the changing nature of records-keeping technology. Representatives of both types of repositories expressed the need for digitization standards and guidelines pertaining to when digitization is appropriate (i.e., for access, not for preservation), scanning and metadata format. For digitized records or records created in electronic format, local governments and repositories need information regarding electronic data management systems (EDMS), the identification and preservation of historically significant of electronic records, and data migration and conversion.

Although electronic records are not yet finding their way into the majority of historical records repositories in large numbers, it is only a matter of time until they do. Repository representatives are well aware of this fact and understand the need to prepare for the influx of records in electronic formats. Town hall meeting attendees indicated that they need help in this area and that they would like the state to provide that help in the form of credible and up-to-date information related to electronic records management and preservation.

Cooperation Among Repositories

A final (and encouraging) topic of discussion at the records town hall meetings was that of cooperation among repositories. Representatives of historical records repositories expressed a willingness to engage in cooperative programs and activities with other repositories, both public and private, in their county or region. Meeting attendees stated that cooperation among repositories could result in a number of potential benefits. Repositories could align their collection policies so that they could cost-effectively collect and preserve a region's historical records without engaging in duplicative and competitive acquisition. Repositories could also encourage access by sharing information on the collections of each repository, perhaps through a shared database or website. Repositories could assist the cause of historical records preservation by joining together to lobby local governments and communities on issues related to historical records and repositories.

Meeting attendees indicated that cooperation between repositories could take several different forms. Suggestions included shared websites or databases, regional forums, cooperative educational efforts, and regional archives programs. As discussed above, repository representatives stated that shared websites or databases could

disseminate information about the holdings of repositories in a region and thus increase their accessibility to researchers (52% of survey respondents were in favor of a multirepository automated catalog). They also proposed the establishing of links to other groups working to preserve and make historical records accessible such as genealogists and city and county clerks. Periodic regional forums to be attended by representatives of a region's repositories and local governments would extend the benefit of web links by providing a venue for discussion of historical records issues. Appropriate topics for discussion at these forums might include collecting activities, collection content information, organizational resources, relevant websites, and educational opportunities. These forums could also provide repository representatives with information and feedback regarding their concerns. Forum attendees could plan outreach activities to city and county clerks through brochures and websites. These forums could even develop into a regional disaster recovery network to be activated in case of a disaster at any of the member repositories. While the regional forums would serve as informal sources of education and information, repositories in a region could also cooperate to sponsor more formal educational offerings such as workshops in archives management, records preservation, and archival technology, as well as other topics of interest.

The most ambitious suggestions related to formal cooperative archival ventures among a group of repositories or communities. One suggestion was that repositories in a region should jointly establish and share in the funding of a centralized repository for that region's historical records. As discussed above, this type of regional repository would be difficult to establish due to numerous jurisdictional issues. This point is emphasized by the fact that when asked about the usefulness of several different cooperative efforts, only 27% of survey respondents stated that they would find a shared storage facility useful. A second suggestion to revive the "circuit-riding archivist" concept was also discussed above. Given enough interest and a commitment (both intellectual and financial) to work with other repositories, there is no reason why shared archival staff should not become a reality.

The concept of cooperation was also considered by survey respondents, who were asked to rate the usefulness of a multirepository automated system, statewide collecting coordination, cooperative purchasing of archival supplies, a centralized preservation laboratory, centralized microfilming/imaging, and shared storage facilities. Respondents rated the centralized preservation lab (71% in favor) and centralized microfilming/imaging (60% in favor) highest. The cooperative purchasing of archival supplies and the multirepository automated catalog also received favorable responses from respondents (56% and 52% respectively). Statewide collecting coordination and shared storage facilities received less favorable responses, with 36% and 27% in favor, respectively.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary conclusion that can be drawn from the assessment of records programs in California's local governments and historical records repositories is that

every aspect of these programs needs assistance of one kind or another. Much of this assistance must come from local resources. As a result, improving the level of administrative and community support for records programs is crucial. Educating resource providers and providing them and local communities with information about the vital role played by historical records would be an important step in the right direction. In addition to needing local resources and assistance, local governments and historical records repositories would also benefit from assistance by the California State Archives and the CHRAB. Representatives of California's local governments and historical records repositories suggested a number of ways in which the State Archives and CHRAB could be of assistance. The types of assistance required by local government records programs and by historical records repositories are discussed above.

Recommendations for Local Governments and Historical Records Repositories

Town hall meeting attendees and survey respondents suggested a number of possible solutions for their common records problems. Several suggestions relate to changes that need to be made by local governments and repositories in order to improve their management of temporary and permanent records. Others relate to cooperative activities that could be of benefit to a region's local government records programs and to historical records repositories.

Imaging and Electronic Records Recommendations

1. Local governments must make quality assurance a regular step in their microfilming and digitizing procedures to ensure that filmed or digitized government records are preserved as long as is required by local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
2. Cities and counties must establish a regular program of data migration to ensure that electronic records created today can be read in the future.
3. Local government employees need to be educated to understand that the records created on their computers, including email, are public records and must be treated as such. Cities and counties need to formulate an email policy that addresses retention and disposition of email.

Regional Cooperation Recommendations

1. Local governments and historical records repositories should create shared websites or databases to disseminate information about the holdings of repositories in a region and thus increase their accessibility to researchers.
2. Local governments and historical repositories should establish links to other groups, such as genealogists and city and county clerks that also work to preserve and make historical records accessible.

3. Local governments and historical repositories should cooperate to send information about the importance of public records to county supervisors, city council members, city and county attorneys, and city and county department heads.
 - a. Cooperative education of resources allocators should also focus on the cost benefits of a well-managed city/county records program. City and county administrators need to be persuaded that records management is good business and promotes economy and efficiency in government.
 - b. Local governments and repositories should inform local government administrators of the potential legal liabilities of not having a records management program. The legal community should be involved in this education effort.
4. Local governments and historical repositories should establish regional forums. These forums should be held periodically and should be attended by representatives of public and private repositories in the area. Forums could help facilitate cooperative activities, including:
 - a. Forums would provide a venue for discussion of historical records issues.
 - b. Forum attendees could plan outreach activities to city and county clerks through brochures and websites.
 - c. Forums could develop into a regional disaster recovery network to be activated in case of a disaster at any of the member repositories.
5. Local governments and historical repositories in a region could cooperate to sponsor formal educational offerings such as workshops in archives management, records preservation, and archival technology, as well as other topics of interest.
6. Local governments and historical repositories could jointly hire an archivist to be shared among them. This would provide each with a professional archivist to operate their historical records program, but only a portion of the expense. This concept is best suited to small cities and repositories.
7. Local governments and historical repositories could jointly establish and share in the funding of a centralized repository for that region's historical records. In this way, the historical records of several local governments and repositories could benefit from optimum procedures and storage conditions.

Recommendations for the State Archives and CHRAB

Survey respondents and town hall meeting attendees had a number of suggestions regarding assistance they would like the State Archives and the CHRAB to provide. These requests were for information or services that could best be provided at the state

level, rather than locally. Recommendations pertained to changes in legislation, records management, electronic records, identification of historical records, records preservation, standards concerning records storage and access, preferred information delivery methods, funding of archival programs, and preservation and appraisal services.

Recommendations regarding Legislation

1. Well-crafted records legislation is necessary to encourage local government administrators to make records management more of a priority. The California Public Records Act should clearly define public records and provide guidance on their retention, mandate a statute of limitations for confidential records, define and mandate protection for historical and electronic records, and mandate storage standards for local government records.
2. California Government Code, section no. 26490, should be revised to encourage the revival of the county historical records commissions. The commissions should be clearly defined and they should serve an oversight role, rather than merely an advisory role. These changes would enable the commissions to serve as advocates for records management and archives in California's counties.

Recommendations regarding Records Management and Archives Information

1. The State Archives should provide information and education about records management and archives.
2. The State Archives should prepare a model presentation containing educational information about the benefits of records management and make this presentation available to government staff and organizations at the local level via the California State Archives web page on the Secretary of State's web site.
3. The State Archives should conduct the necessary legal research and then publish retention guidelines for city and county records as many other states do. Local governments would then have some level of confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the recommended retention guidelines. Cities and counties would still have to inventory their departmental records and schedule their unique records. They would also have to change some retention periods due to local ordinances and needs. However, the bulk of their retention schedules could be prepared without conducting legal research, thus saving both staff time and money.
4. The State Archives should provide credible and up-to-date information related to electronic records management and preservation.
5. The State Archives should make scanning and metadata standards available on their web page. The standards could be those developed by the California State Library or another appropriate organization.

6. The State Archives should provide local governments and records repositories with information about how to identify historical records. The State Archives could provide appraisal guidelines by revising the 1981 report on the "Identification of the Historical Records of County Government in California."
7. The State Archives provide guidelines for the preservation and proper storage of historical records. These guidelines should contain criteria that must be met by offsite storage vendors to ensure the preservation of records stored there.
8. The State Archives should provide information about the responsibilities of repositories (public or private) holding public records toward the government records they store and toward the public for whom they make these records accessible.

Recommendations regarding Information Delivery Methods

1. The State Archives should assume a role in providing unbiased and credible records management and archives information to California's local governments and historical records repositories. The State Archives could do this by creating and operating a web site that would serve as a clearinghouse of records management/archives guidelines, best practices, model programs, standards, innovations developed elsewhere, and links to expanded information. This web site could also provide online workshops and distance education programs in records management and archives.
2. The State Archives should designate staff that could function as field consultants and travel to repositories and local governments in order to conduct archival needs assessments and provide advice. These archivists would also be charged with responding to telephone calls from historical repositories and local governments requesting advice.
3. The State Archives should offer regional workshops on various basic records management and archival topics.

Regrant Program Recommendations

1. CHRAB should establish a regrant program to provide funding to local governments and historical records repositories. Under this program, the Board would obtain grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, or another appropriate agency, and use the grant funds to support records management and archives programs at the local level.
2. Regrants would allow historical records repositories and local governments to hire archival consultants to conduct needs assessments. This would be particularly helpful to the many small, local repositories that are operated solely by volunteers. These

repositories seldom have the funds to hire consultants, much less professional staff, but at the same time, they need such help more than most other repositories.

3. Regrant funds could be used to purchase archival storage supplies or make other improvements to the storage of historical materials. They could also be used to pay for paper conservation or book repair/rebinding activities.
4. Regrant funds could be used to support staff training activities such as attendance at workshops, institutes, or university extension classes.

Preservation and Appraisal Recommendations

1. The State Archives should provide fee-based preservation services through its preservation laboratory to local governments and historical records repositories. There is a need for such services in California, since local governments and community historical repositories do not have access to an inhouse preservation lab and there are no labs whose mission is the provision of preservation services to the public.
2. The State Archives should also provide records appraisal services to local governments in cases where printed or web-based information proved inconclusive regarding the historical significance of a records series.

Conclusion

The consensus among representatives of local government and historical records repositories is that the California State Archives and CHRAB need to become activist organizations in the interest of California's public and private historical records. While the State Archives will continue to focus primarily on the records of state government, it should also emphasize outreach to local governments and historical records repositories. The most requested method of outreach is the creation of a website to serve as a clearinghouse of records management and archives standards, guidelines, and general information. The appointment of State Archives field staff to provide records management and archival advice through onsite visits and telephone consultation would also be welcomed by California's local governments and historical records repositories. Finally, opening the State Archives' preservation lab to the use of local governments and historical repositories in California would provide a much-needed service.

The CHRAB also needs to take on a more active role. It should move beyond its perceived focus on reviewing grant proposals. CHRAB should primarily serve as an advocate for historical records in California by lobbying for the needs of historical records programs, as well as by providing practical assistance through regrant funding to respond to those needs.